

# Gecko News



## The American International school of Conakry

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Mr. Greg Hughes, Director

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Dear Parents,

### Director's Message:

Part of the joy of living abroad is the fast past pace at which things happen and while this can be an exhilarating thrill when things happen for the better, it can be a shock and trauma when things go in the opposite direction. Over the past week in much of my correspondence I have had with others, I have mentioned the need for us collectively as a school to “catch our breath” and to reevaluate our current position as a school, before we start the process of once again moving ahead.



With the entire week completed it was most definitely a “breath of fresh air” and a chance for us to experience some form of normality in school life. With positive signs emanating on the political front we are ever hopeful that this trend will continue. While school is open it is definitely different in that our enrollment has dropped and the feel around the school has changed as the noise, commotion and bustle created by our 50+ students of before is not quite there.

For many of us the adjustments we need to make are complex and for the students, teachers and administrators alike these changes came suddenly. The end of the school year is often a sad time as some friends move on, and this obviously is an emotional period for all, but when friends leave quickly without warning as is the case of several of our families who evacuated it can be a difficult period of adjustment for these families in particular but also for those of us who are left behind.

Different people deal with stress and trauma in different ways and while the most recent events may have had little or no impact on some of our students, others could be going through a tough period of their lives and we all have a responsibility to not only identify these people in need but to help them through this difficult time. As a school we will be implementing strategies to help students during this time but the responsibility of ensuring the mental health of all of our students is a collective one. In particular parents should be aware that their own children may require some counseling and take steps to engage them and develop strategies for coping. I have attached some advice that I have downloaded online to give parents an indication of the signs to lookout for in their children and also some useful and simple strategies to apply when talking with your child about recent events and particularly those relating to the tragic events of September 28.

The school has changed dramatically over the past few weeks and more changes will no doubt occur as we come to grips with our new dynamic. Some of the things however which will never change at AISC are the care and respect that we offer to each other, our mutual support and our strong sense of community that permeates throughout our school. While it takes many things to make a school successful these characteristics will go a long way to returning our school back to where we were.

Have a great weekend and I look forward, as we all do, to another peaceful week of school starting next Monday.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Hughes

Director

The American International School of Conakry

### AISC MISSION STATEMENT

The American International School of Conakry is a community of learners engaging in discovery and invention, reflection and problems solving. We teach an International curriculum using diverse teaching methods so our international student body will be lifelong learners with the knowledge, creativity, ethical values, and sense of worth necessary to flourish in a rapidly changing global society.

## Some tips for dealing with children in crisis situation;

- **Reassure children that they are safe.** Explain to them that there are good, competent people in charge who are working to keep us all safe.
- **Point out good deeds that have come out of this tragedy.** Focus on stories of heroism and generosity to help children fortify their belief in humanity.
- **Explain that feeling upset is normal.** Communicate to your children that being sad or crying about these events is ok.
- **Talk about the tragedy with children old enough to understand recent events.** Tell your children the truth, but make sure that your explanations are age-appropriate. Younger children will need brief information (only if they are aware of the tragedy and are asking questions) combined with reassurances of safety and love. Older children will be able to ask more involved questions and may need more detailed reassurances about why they are safe. Give children the answers to their questions and try to avoid speculation. Be a good listener and ask your children why they are asking the questions they are asking, to get to the root of their anxiety.
- **Try to keep your routine.** This fosters feelings of safety and stability.
- **Encourage young children to express their feelings through art.** This may help them express thoughts they are unable to articulate.
- **Stay calm.** Children take cues from your behavior. It is ok to show that you are upset, but avoid expressing strong feelings of anger, fear, or hopelessness.
- **Try to spend more time with your children.** Tell them that you love them and engage them with quiet, calming activities.
- **Limit exposure to the media.** Avoid "staying glued" to the television or internet. Instead, watch for a brief time and then talk about what you are seeing.
- **Don't punish children for reverting to behaviors from an earlier age, e.g., bed-wetting.** Instead, encourage them to verbalize the feelings behind their actions. These behaviors will subside over time.
- **Be familiar with signs of trauma and monitor your child's behavior in the upcoming weeks.** Be in touch with teachers and caregivers to ask about your child's behavior.
- **Take care of yourself.** Your children take cues from your words and actions, and you will need to take care of your own needs in order to stay calm and strong for your children. Seek out community resources to find the support you need.

### AISC Dates to Remember

Date	Time	Activity/Location
Nov. 2009		Holiday for Tabaski (TBC)
Nov. 26, 2009		Thanksgiving
Dec. 19-Jan. 10, 2009		Christmas Break